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## The Curious 1884 Census of Health and Fire Wards in Honolulu

THIS BRIEF NOTE discusses a little known, potentially useful, and possibly misleading set of small-area population statistics for Honolulu District, compiled from the 1884 census.<sup>1</sup> The 1884 count is notable for being only the second in the historical record to provide demographic detail for Honolulu sub-districts; eight of its nine predecessor enumerations, all except that for 1866, had limited their geographic breakdowns for Honolulu to the district totals.<sup>2</sup> Honolulu district in those days extended from Moanalua to Koko Head.

The 1884 enumeration, unlike earlier censuses, provided separate statistics for each of the "Health and Fire Wards" recognized by the census officials. Data were compiled separately for 13 such sub-areas, of which three (Wards 10, 11 and 12) were tabulated in combined form and the thirteenth consisted of persons living aboard ships in Honolulu Harbor. A map of these districts with district numbers manually inserted in red ink was part of the published report, and is herewith reproduced as figure 1.

The accompanying three tables present 54 statistical series for each of the sub-areas: elevation, land area, total population, density, age by sex, marital status by sex, race or nationality by sex, percent Chinese, broad occupational group, number of freeholders, religion, and ability to read and write.

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FIG. 1. Honolulu Census districts in 1884.

Population densities in 1884 ranged from 3.0 persons per acre in Ward 5 ("almost exclusively occupied by business houses and machine shops," according to the census text) to 38.0 per acre in Ward 6 (bounded by Fort, Beretania, Richards, and King Streets). Honolulu District as a whole had a population density of 17.8 per acre, excluding persons afloat.

The district reported a total of 20,487 inhabitants in 1884, an increase of 45.2 percent since the 1878 count. This striking rate of growth, the highest Honolulu rate observed to that date in a Hawaiian census, largely reflected the expansion of the sugar industry in the late 19th century.

The district contained a relatively young, racially diverse, and mostly unmarried population. By age, 26.0 percent were under 15 years, 9.1 percent were 50 or older, and the median age was 24.5 years. Major racial or national groups included "natives" (43.9 percent), "half-castes" (9.0 percent), Portuguese (2.8 percent), other Caucasians (typically Europeans and Americans) (17.9 percent), Chinese (25.5 percent), Japanese (0.2 percent), and Polynesians other than Hawaiians (0.6 percent). Only 57.2 percent of the population in 1884 had been born in the Islands. Males outnumbered females by 62.1 percent. Among persons 15 years and older, 41.5 percent of the males and 57.1 percent of the females were currently married. A question on religion found 37.5 percent to be Protestants and 21.0 percent Roman Catholics. Among persons six years old and over, 58.7 percent could read and write. Freeholders numbered only 1,482.

The foregoing analysis applies to Honolulu totals; much wider contrasts would be evident among the ten statistical areas or combinations of areas reported in the census. Unfortunately, such small-area data were separately tabulated only in 1866 and 1884, and this level of geographic detail was not repeated until 46 years later, at the time of the 1930 census. It is thus impossible to track small-area trends from census to census prior to the 1930s. Even so, the 1884 count described here may provide a useful glimpse of Honolulu localities more than a century ago.

Readers familiar with neighborhood growth patterns in Honolulu will notice some perplexing aspects of the data. The census narrative, for example, correctly describes Ward 3 (bounded by Beretania, Fort

and King streets, ending at Palama Junction) as "being the especial haunt of the Chinese." According to the table, however, only 4.8 percent of the population of Ward 3 was Chinese, the *lowest* ratio of any of the ten statistical areas. (table 1) This apparent discrepancy was noted many years ago by sociologist Andrew W. Lind, who felt that it cast doubt on the whole census table.<sup>3</sup> Were the wards misnumbered on the census map? If so, the unique value of the ward tabulation vanishes, even though the Honolulu District totals may still be reasonably accurate. Arguing against possible misnumbering is the fact that the 1890 map of fire and election wards shows fire ward boundaries almost identical to those of 1884.<sup>4</sup>

Problems with the 1884 census were recognized at the time, even though the possible misreporting of ward statistics seems to have escaped notice. A legislative commission appointed to investigate the census concluded "the last census was probably more inaccurate than its predecessors for many years; and the changed condition of society abundantly accounts for the fact. . . . [T]he Superintendent of the census of 1884, was allowed no clerical aid whatever, and was paid less than seven hundred dollars for his own services. The only wonder is

Table 1. Number and Percent of Population Chinese for Honolulu District by Wards: 1884

Ward	Number	Percent
Honolulu District . . . . .	5,225	25.5
1 . . . . .	158	22.9
2 . . . . .	412	25.8
3 . . . . .	38	4.8
4 . . . . .	144	19.0
5 . . . . .	10	9.0
6 . . . . .	148	15.2
7 . . . . .	85	6.7
8 . . . . .	49	5.3
9 . . . . .	225	13.0
10-12 . . . . .	3,780	35.3
Harbor . . . . .	176	0.3

Source: Computed from *Census of the Hawaiian Islands taken December 27th, 1884*.

that he ever reported at all." The per capita expenditure for the entire 1884 census was only 6.54 cents!<sup>5</sup>

Can we believe the census results? Certainly, we must treat the ward statistics cited here with skepticism. The Honolulu District totals are probably less questionable, and do not present any serious contradictions. But with any 1884 census statistics, and especially the ward data, the user must use caution.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Census of the Hawaiian Islands Taken December 27th, 1884, Under the Direction of the Board of Education.*

<sup>2</sup> For more on the 1866 census, see Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778-1965* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 46-78, and "The Population of Honolulu Sub-districts in 1866," *HJH* 30 (1996): 223-225.

<sup>3</sup> Lind, remark to Schmitt, date not recorded.

<sup>4</sup> "Map of Honolulu City, Hawaiian Islands, Showing Fire and Election Wards." Map, AH, G9382.02:346, 1890, P7. The 1890 small-area tabulations were limited to sex and race for each of the five Honolulu representative districts.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Public Instruction, *Report of the General Superintendent of the Census, 1890* (Honolulu: R. Grieve, 1891) 11.

